

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BOGOTA 02546 201742Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-08 DOTE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 OES-07 HEW-04 AGRE-00 COME-00 AID-05
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R 172009Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6954

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 2546

NSC FOR ROBERT PASTOR

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELTN, CO
SUBJ: INTERAMERICAN HIGHWAY

1. IN A CONVERSATION ON MARCH 16 WITH CONSERVATIVE PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BELISARIO BETANCUR, THE AMBASSADOR RAISED, AMONG OTHER POINTS, THE SUBJECT OF THE INTERAMERICAN HIGHWAY. THE AMBASSADOR EXPLAINED TO BETANCUR THE CURRENT PROBLEMS SURROUNDING COMPLETION OF THE HIGHWAY IN COLOMBIA AND ENQUIRED ABOUT HIS VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT.

2. BETANCUR WAS LYRIC ABOUT THE HIGHWAY. HE EXPLAINED THAT HE WAS SEEKING ONE OR MORE IMPORTANT NATIONAL GOALS, WHICH HE, AS PRESIDENT, WOULD USE TO INSPIRE AND TO PROVIDE PURPOSE TO COLOMBIAN LIFE. HE STATED THAT COMPLETION OF THE HIGHWAY AT THE DARIEN GAP AND ITS ROLE IN HELPING TO INCORPORATE STILL ISOLATED REGIONS OF COLOMBIA WAS ONE SUCH NATIONAL GOAL THAT HE HAD IN MIND. HE EXPLAINED HIS VIEW THAT KEY INSTITUTIONS, SUCH AS THE CLERGY, THE POLITICAL CLASS AND THE MILITARY, WHICH HAD FORMERLY LENT DIRECTION TO COLOMBIANS, WERE NO LONGER PERFORMING THAT FUNCTION.

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 02546 201742Z

3. LIBERAL CANDIDATE JULIO CESAR TURBAY HAS ALSO EXPRESSED TO THE AMBASSADOR HIS STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE INTERAMERICAN HIGHWAY. TURBAY HAS SAID THAT IF HE IS ELECTED HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD GIVE ITS FULL ATTENTION TO OVERCOMING PROBLEMS, SUCH AS HOOF AND MOUTH DISEASE, WHICH ARE DELAYING COMPLETION OF THE HIGHWAY. IT WOULD SEEM THAT WHICHEVER OF THE TWO CANDIDATES IS ELECTED IN JUNE, HIS GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE THE HIGHWAY IN COLOMBIA A

MATTER OF FIRST PRIORITY.

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